

PAM.
TURK.EMP.

1890

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS BULLETIN

ISSUED WEEKLY

Vol. XVI

DECEMBER 23, 1918

No. 17

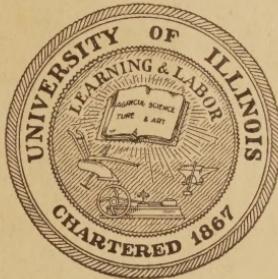
[Entered as second-class matter December 11, 1912, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the Act of August 24, 1912. Acceptance for mailing at the special rate of postage provided for in section 1103 Act of October 3, 1917, authorized July 31, 1918.]

The New Arab Kingdom and the Fate of The Muslim World

BY

ALBERT TEN EYCK OLMSTEAD

Professor of History



Price 10 cents

PUBLISHED BY THE WAR COMMITTEE
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA

THE NEW ARAB KINGDOM AND THE FATE OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

In the autumn of 1916, a bored newspaper correspondent at Washington amused his readers with an account of a new power, somewhere in Arabia, whose request for recognition had caused our Department of State no little search to discover its exact location. Shortly after, professional orientalists were afforded that first of all proofs that a state actually exists: stamps marked "Hijaz Post." Since then, the metropolitan papers have occasionally devoted two or three lines to the advance made by the sultan of that country east of the Jordan and little more has been contributed by our periodicals.

Prophecy has never been more at a discount than at the present, and yet we may venture the prediction that here we have an event of world meaning, that problems are raised which America must aid in settling, that the historians of the future may see in this event one of the most important results of the war. Americans have devoted little enough attention to the Near Eastern Question as a whole; the Arabian phase is virtually unknown.

What has happened is no less than the rebirth of Islam. We all know from our school books that Islam began with Mohammed in Mecca, that under his immediate successors it conquered the greater part of the civilized world, and that there was developed within the century a civilization without a contemporary rival. We may further remember that the original Arab rulers were supplanted by Persians, Moors, and Turks, and that the civilization was transformed and then began to decline. Here our knowledge is likely to end. Few of us realize that Islam is one of the most potent forces in the world today, that it counts its adherents by the hundred millions, that in the waste places of the earth it converts its hundreds where Christianity wins its tens, that its followers occupy a belt of the best territory on earth, extending from Morocco and the Sudan to China and the Philippines. What happens in Mecca becomes matter for more than amusement when we realize that hundreds of thousands of men under our own flag feel exactly the same sentiments toward that city that other millions of our fellow-citizens feel toward Rome.

Contrary to the general belief, the "Unspeakable Turk" has his good points. He is a soldier without superior, has much administrative

ability, and, where he has not been corrupted by intermarriage with other races or by so-called "Liberalism" in the guise of the pro-German "Young Turk," he is, man for man, the equal of his western brother of similar social standing. Unfortunately, he is a northerner ruling southerners. He is slow, stolid, solid, rather contemptuous of the man from the south who is quicker in guile as in the field of the intellect. He takes over and patronizes, by virtue of his being a better soldier and ruler, a culture he is incapable of producing. To the man of the south, he is a northern barbarian, speaking a language which has no connection with the sacred speech used by the Prophet and preserved to posterity in the Koran. He clings to customs which are only nominally glossed over by the Sacred Law and is no fit successor to the Prophet. The Arab has never forgotten that his was and is the sacred language, that the Koran can rightly be read only in Arabic, that from his race came the Prophet, that in his land are found the four holy cities of Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and Hebron, and that all the cities most intimately connected with the glories of the Caliphate—Alexandria, Damascus, Baghdad, still speak Arabic. He would be more than human did he not look forward to the day when once more from Mecca would the Law go forth.

In the eighties of the last century, Islam seemed about to follow Turkey into dissolution. That it did not do so was largely the work of Abdul Hamid, who first discovered the worth to the state of a pan-Islam in which Constantinople might supplant Mecca as Rome had supplanted Jerusalem in the Middle Ages. History might today be profoundly different had this ideal continued pure and undefiled. Hungarian writers assisted in transforming the pan-Islamic into the pan-Turanian movement; but if Hungarian, Finn, and Russian Tatar were thereby won to Turkish support, the Arab speaking world was definitely alienated. Rebellion became chronic in the Yemen, in southwest Arabia, the most desirable part of the peninsula. Army after army was lost by battle, disease, and treachery. The Turkish Revolution of 1908, with its brief "Era of Good Feeling," for the moment checked the Arab movement, but it revived at once when the Young Turks, in their unfortunate imitation of western nationalism, began the Ottomanization of the Empire. Radicals went so far as to demand a Turkish translation of the Koran, the use of that language exclusively on trains, in newspapers, in private bookkeeping. By such means, the close connection with Hungary was continued, Bulgaria suddenly discovered

that the original Bulgars had been Turanians and so fit allies for the Turks, Muslim intellectuals in Trans-Caucasian Russia longed for the day when they should be restored to Turkey. To the debit side of the account must be placed the complete alienation of all the other nationalities in Turkey, Muslim equally with Christian. When the Great War began, the Arabic-speaking peoples were ripe for revolt.

Before any overt act occurred, Turkish officials seized and killed the Syrian leaders in several cities. Among the patriots thus executed were members of the tribe of the Sheriff of Mecca, a descendant of the Prophet, and the official head of the sacred city. Already predisposed to revolt by the "Liberalism" of Enver Pasha and the Committee for Union and Progress, by their scarcely concealed agnosticism, and by the deliberate abrogation of provisions of the Sacred Law laid down in the Koran itself, the Arabs felt themselves provoked beyond endurance. In a ringing address to "all our Muslim brethren," Husein, the son of Ali, appealed to Allah as judge, in the words of the Book, mourned the loss of Muslim prestige brought about by the Young Turk fiascoes in Tripoli and the Balkans, and its present perilous position. He condemned the horrors of deportation, the murder of leading Muslims, the banishments and confiscations of property belonging to the innocent families of victims. Then he told of the revenge taken by the Turkish garrison for the revolt of Mecca, how a shell fell but four feet from the very house of Allah, how the rug that covered the Sacred Black Stone was fired, the despair of the pious as they saw it and the killing of worshippers every day within the sacred precincts until worship was perforce discontinued. No westerner can realize the thrill of horror such sacrilege must produce in the breast of every true Muslim. Islam had not risen when the Turks, at the dictation of their infidel masters, had preached the Holy War. Henceforth, there could be no doubt as to the position every true Muslim must take.

The cup of Young Turk iniquity was full, and on the sixteenth of November, 1916, Husein was declared Sultan of the Hejaz and was promptly recognized by the Entente Powers. By their operations east of the Dead Sea, the Arabs did much to render futile the Turko-German advance against Egypt, thus saving the Suez Canal and the route to India and Australia. They played their part in the redemption of Jerusalem by drawing off troops at a time when these were desperately needed by the Turks. In the last campaign, they assisted the British in the great drive which carried the allies from Samaria to Aleppo.

The war in the Near East has ended in the complete triumph of our allies and only the political settlement remains. A son of the Sherif has arrived in Paris, has been assigned two delegates at the conference, and has given tea to American correspondents. Already we can see, at least in outline, the problems which must be solved. First, a new state has come into the world; and, whatever aid it may receive from the Entente Powers, it must be independent in every sense, or Muslim thought will be outraged. At present, it occupies only the Hejaz, the strip along the west coast of Arabia, with the holy cities, plus a line of advance up the Mecca Railroad to Syria, but its claims are far wider, even to Syria as a whole. Yemen is in anarchy, with the chance that the anarchy will be ended with some sort of British rule, for Yemen forms the back country to Aden, and Aden commands the exit of the Red Sea, the route to India. The center of the peninsula is the home of the fickle wandering tribes or of oasis cities ruled by emirs who may admit the Sultan as first among equals, but will not surrender their local autonomy without a struggle. Oman and the other states along the seaboard are more or less under British protection; Syria, Babylonia, Mesopotamia, are actually being administered by British soldiers; next door, across the narrow Red Sea, Egypt is a British protectorate; and India, with its hundred million Muslims, is likewise British, however much this fact may be hidden by native rulers with splendid courts. General Maude, in the proclamation issued after the capture of Baghdad, expressed the "hope and desire of the British people and the nations in alliance with them that the Arab race may rise once more to greatness and renown among the peoples of the earth, and that it shall bind itself together to this end in unity and concord . . . : that you may be united with your kinsmen in north, east, south, and west, in realizing the aspirations of your race."

Whether practical politics will permit the coming true of these and similar aspirations remains to be seen. The pure Arab is an extreme individualist, and there is much the same spirit among the others who speak Arabic. The Near East has rarely been a unity, and then generally under foreign control. If Muslim Arabs could for once be induced to abandon their old time desert individualism, there is still the fact that they do not comprise all the Arab speaking population, and that they are not a religious unity among themselves. The true Arab of the desert permits his religion to sit lightly upon him, and with the mass of the Muslim Arabs, is nominally Sunni or orthodox, though without

fanaticism. Babylonia is largely occupied by Shias, or Dissenters, who are among the fanatics of the world. Here are the sacred cities of the Persians, Kerbela, Nejf, Kadhemin, with their minarets plated with solid gold, their trade in corpses brought from afar to be buried in the sacred soil where once flowed the blood of Ali, martyred son-in-law of the Prophet. To them come bands of pilgrims, who will not give a drink of water to the fainting traveller, lest he defile the cup by lack of orthodoxy, who work themselves up into a frenzy in acting the sacred dramas which relate the death of Hassan and Hussein, the murdered grandsons of the Prophet, until the blood flows from the self-inflicted wounds, and the stranger betakes himself away for safety. Here are to be found the spiritual leaders of Persia, and from here came the impulse for the short lived Persian constitution. Babylonia is the port of entry for much of Persia's commerce, she is likewise the center of Persian life.

In the mountains to the north and east are the Nestorian Christians, further west are the Jacobites, both clinging to the remnants of their Syriac language and literature. Armenians press into the northern part of the Mesopotamian area, while many Christians now speak the Kurdish of their barbarous masters who roam the prairies with their flocks of sheep and goats, or exchange their black goat's hair tents for adobe huts without thereby abandoning their rapacious habits. For the most part, however, Mesopotamia is still virgin soil, for even in antiquity the land was tilled only close to the rivers. The problem today is that of the scientific conservation and use of water; this affects the problem of boundaries. At first glance, no finer example of a scientific frontier could be found, for the Armenian barrier range is almost a straight line from east to west, cut by few and difficult passes, and with the population on the two sides essentially different in type. Today, when irrigation is the great problem, we see that irrigation must be based on the Euphrates, not the Tigris, and that inevitably means the control of the Euphrates watershed far to the north of the barrier range by the power which owns Mesopotamia.

Central Syria affords a problem of more than usual complexity. The inhabitants of Mount Lebanon are among the best of the earth in physical and mental strength. Unfortunately, half are Christians, the other half Druses, an unorthodox Muslim sect, and warfare between the two is the one theme of Lebanon history. The Christians are largely Maronites, Syrians reconciled with the Latin Church, who have been

permitted to retain their liturgy in their native language and many of their peculiar customs in return for their recognition of Rome. As such they were protected by the French, the official defenders of Catholics in the Near East. When an unusually vigorous conflict resulted in the Damascus "massacres" of 1860, French troops were landed to "restore order" and the Lebanon was given local autonomy under a Christian governor appointed with the approval of the Powers. The denunciation of the Concordat by the French government ended the protectorate and the French flag no longer floated on holy days over every Catholic institution in Syria, but French influence continued strong and many of the Lebanese received their training in the splendid Jesuit university of St. Joseph in Beirut. The Druses, forced to look elsewhere for a defender, found one in the English, who long exercised great influence over their "brethren." In a secret treaty, soon after the outbreak of the war, the British threw over their allies and assigned the Lebanon to France.

For two generations, American missionaries have carried on work in the Lebanons which can only be termed magnificent. The Syrian Protestant College in Beirut has been a worthy rival of the Jesuit institution. American ways have been introduced by its staff of American teachers, the scientific investigation of the country has begun, on the football field the most diverse races and religions have learned team work and self-control. The lower classes have meanwhile migrated to America. No village in the most remote mountains but will furnish a man to salute you with "Hello there, you an American? I am an American too," to inform you that he came from San Antonio, Texas, or Fort Wayne, Indiana, to swear a little just to show you that he is a genuine American. In his house, he will proudly exhibit the papers which prove that he is "an American citizen, just like you." Long ago, some of these men dreamed of the day when America would oust the Turk, and now the New Syria National League demands a federated Syria, "from the Taurus Mountains to the Sinai Peninsula," and "that the United States assume guardianship and administration of Syria until such a time as the Syrians are able to perform the functions of full self-government."

America is again brought into contact with the Near East in Palestine. Zionism has received the support of many of our citizens of Jewish descent and there are few Christians but would rejoice that there is hope of a "Return to Zion." None the less, we cannot overlook the

obstacles to a Zionist state. The majority of the population of Palestine, descendants of pre-Mosaic Canaanites, are Muslims, and there exists a large sprinkling of Christians. The site of Solomon's temple is the third most holy Muslim shrine. When Jersualem was taken by General Allenby, it was not handed over to the Jews. Instead, to quote his official report, "The Mosque of Omar and the area around it have been placed under Moslem control, and a military cordon of Mohammedian officers and soldiers has been established around the mosque. Orders have been issued that no non-Moslem is to pass within the cordon without permission of the military governor and the Moslem in charge;" Christian and Jew excluded from so sacred a place, and in favor of Muslims! The policy is clear. Equally clear is the proclamation which declared that the sacred shrine of Hebron, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with their wives, are supposed to be buried, "has been placed under exclusive Moslem control."

The lands belonging to Muslim mosques and schools, to Christian churches and monasteries, add the complication of vested interest. Much of the remainder is owned by Christian and Muslim notables and they are up in arms over the new invasion. Massmeetings of Christians and Muslims have been held, protection has been demanded against forced sales under unfair conditions, and the use of Arabic as the only official language. This has been conceded in principle and Allenby has refused to register land transfers made since the occupation. Sir Syed Ameer Ali, probably the greatest living Muslim publicist, has strongly declared the Germanic origin of Zionism and has categorically stated the displeasure of Muslims at the change of policy. British policy in the east does indeed rest on Muslim support and when he points out the relative numbers of Muslims and of Jews in the world and the number who today support Britain, he brings forward what after all must be the most serious objection, from the British point of view, to an independent Palestine.

The clash of Muslim and Zionist interests is undoubted. We need not on that account believe them hopelessly impossible of reconciliation. Many of the Zionists are now stating that it is "not only unwise but positively unjust to ask the peace Conference for an immediate Jewish state. It was for them to ask, in the first place, for recognition by the world that Palestine was the Jewish land in the past and would again be the Jewish land in the future. They should ask for opportunities to bring the Jews back to Palestine. It would depend on the Jews

themselves to build up the Jewish commonwealth. When once Great Britain was appointed trustee, they would, in conjunction with Great Britain, prepare and carry out a detailed scheme for building up the Jewish Commonwealth. The Jewish land-holding must first of all be greatly increased. By democratic legislation this could be brought about, with due regard to the rights of all other inhabitants. There was ample elbow-room there, as the land was very sparsely populated. It is obvious that a vast population can be brought into the country without the slightest encroachments upon the rights of the Arab peasant." Such, somewhat condensed, is the statement made by Dr. Weizmann, chairman of the Zionist Commission sent out under the auspices of the British government. Contrasted with the dreams of many believers in the "Return to Zion," it is very modest, but it represents a program which is perfectly possible to execute, and, what is at present much more to the point, it represents what the practical Briton believes to be the utmost which can be conceded in view of the promises made to the Arab kingdom.

For Husein, Sultan of the Hejaz, is no small force to be reckoned with. When Faisul, his son, entered Damascus, he "announced that he made no distinction between members of the Arab nation, of whatever creed or religion. I shall never betray the Arabs, and I trust that the Arabic language will attain the position that it deserves. It is the suffering of the Syrian nation and the atrocities which they have suffered from the Turks which have brought about this day." "The sword of the Arabs could not be sheathed until the other regions held by the Turks were freed," and he pointedly included Aleppo, far to the north in Syria, in the "Arabian country." All Syria might be claimed on this basis.

Yet when he arrived in London, he could declare "The two main branches of the Semitic family, Arabs and Jews, understand one another, and I hope that, as a result of interchange of ideas at the Peace Conference, which will be guided by ideals of self-determination and nationality, each nation will make definite progress towards the realization of its aspirations. Arabs are not jealous of Zionist Jews, and intend to give them fair play, and the Zionist Jews have assured the Nationalist Arabs of their intention to see that they, too, have fair play in their respective areas. Turkish intrigue in Palestine has raised jealousy between the Jewish colonists and the local peasants, but the mutual understanding of the aims of Arabs and Jews will at once clear away the last trace of this former bitterness, which, indeed, had already

practically disappeared even before the war by the work of the Arab secret Revolutionary Committee, which, in Syria and elsewhere, laid the foundation of the Arab military successes of the past two years.” To the practiced ear, there is a marked difference between the two speeches. In the intervening time, Mecca as well as Jerusalem had heard from London.

Whatever the immediate decision as to the territories controlled by the Hejaz Sultan, his spiritual position is a portent for the future. The present Sultan still calls himself the Caliph, the “Successor of the Prophet,” but he is now completely discredited. Historically, his title was of more than doubtful legality, and he was accepted only because Turkey was the one important Muslim power. Muslim publicists have of late challenged his title anew and the strong protest of the Meccan Ulema, perhaps the most respected body of theologians and jurists in the Muslim world, closes with the sinister request that their opponents consider this question: “What is the Caliphate and what are its conditions? As to the question of the Caliphate, in spite of all that is known of the deplorable condition in which it is situated at the present moment, we have not interfered with it at all, and it will remain as it is pending the decision of the whole Muslim world.” The significance of the last few words cannot well be exaggerated.

Meanwhile, the Sultan of the Hejaz is the most observed of all Muslims. Thus far, his actions have been such as to secure the respect and admiration of all who fight for freedom. For the first time in centuries, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca has been conducted without robbery and slaughter on the road. Mecca has at last something like modern sanitation, and travellers need no longer hasten to reach rail head before the coming of the pilgrim caravan and the concomitant cholera. Public schools, public works, a newspaper, the use of foreign and Christian agencies, even to the Red Cross, all are to be noted.

In the last analysis, it is still the Golden Rule which measures a man and a religion. We all know how “Christian” Germany was responsible for the murder or deportation of millions of unfortunate Armenians. On the borders of the desert east of Palestine, Faisul, son and general of the Hejaz Sultan, found some of the unfortunates the Young Turk had left to perish. He freed them, aided them to the best of his ability, and sent out of the country such as wished. An Armenian Pasha in Egypt sent him this telegram: “Every Armenian throughout the world is today the Ally of the Arab movement.” To similar words of

appreciation for this act, Sultan Husein replied: "Faisul, in assisting the oppressed, has only performed one of the first duties of our religion and of the Arab's faith. I say with confidence and pride that the Armenian race and other races in similar plight are regarded by us as partners in weal and woe. We ask God before everything to give us strength to enable us to do them helpful service by which to prove to the world the true feelings of Islam, whose watchword is freedom."

With such a confession of faith, we need not wonder that of the two hundred and fifty million Muslims of the world, a bare five per cent was ever on the side of our opponents, that nearly the entire remainder, before the breakdown of Russia, was definitely pledged to the cause of liberty, that many were fighting side by side with our boys in France. By their action in this war, as well as by the weight of their numbers and their unrivalled position at the very heart of the old world, they demand and will secure adequate treatment at the peace table.¹

¹This article is a revision of one presented in the *Historical Outlook*, IX: 480 ff.